

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3492
NORTHWESTERN PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY
IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR LARGO, CALIF., ON
OCTOBER 29, 1952

SUMMARY

Date: October 29, 1952

Railroad: Northwestern Pacific

Location: Largo, Calif.

Kind of accident: Head-end collision

Trains involved: Engine : Freight

Train numbers: Extra 2348 East : Extra 5261 West

Engine numbers: 2348 : Diesel-electric
unit 5261

Consist: : 58 cars, caboose

Estimated speeds: 18 m. p. h. : 22 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; 8° curve; 0.57 percent
ascending grade eastward

Weather: Clear

Time: 2:30 p. m.

Casualties: 2 killed; 4 injured

Cause: Overlapping of authority of two
opposing extra trains

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3492

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

NORTHWESTERN PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

December 29, 1952

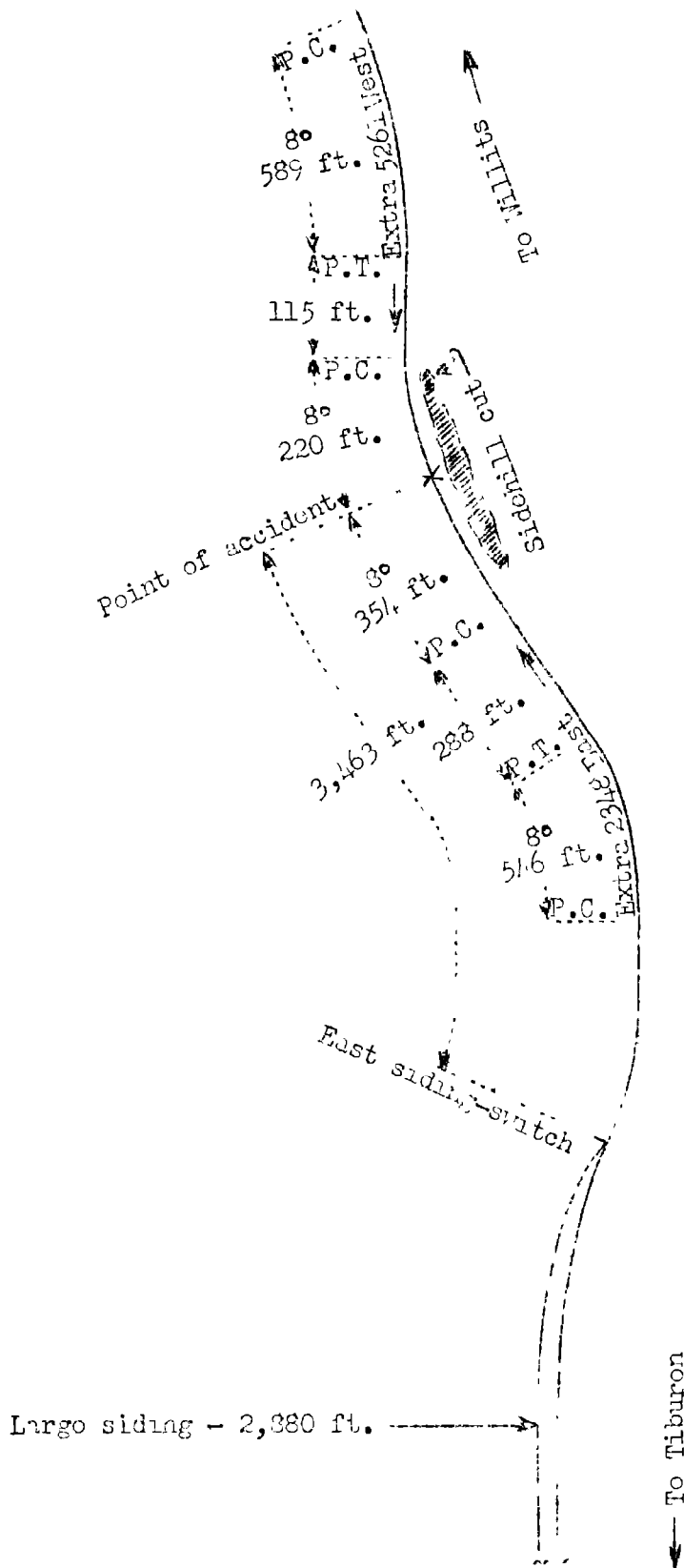
Accident near Largo, Calif., on October 29, 1952, caused
by overlapping of authority of two opposing extra
trains.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On October 29, 1952, there was a head-end collision between an engine and a freight train on the Northwestern Pacific Railroad near Largo, Calif., which resulted in the death of two employees, and the injury of four employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Public Utilities Commission of California.

¹ Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and disposition.



- o Willits, Calif.
- | 17.4 mi.
- o Redwood Valley
- | 8.1 mi.
- o Ukiah
- | 10.1 mi.
- X (Point of accident)
- | Largo
- | 79.0 mi.
- o Ignacio
- | 16.8 mi.
- o Tiburon, Calif.

Report No. 2492
Northwestern Pacific Railroad
Largo, Calif.
October 29, 1952

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Southern Division extending between Tiburon and Willits, Calif., 131.4 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. At Largo, 95.8 miles east of Tiburon, a siding 2,880 feet in length parallels the main track on the north. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 3,463 feet east of the east siding-switch at Largo. From the west there are, in succession, an 8° curve to the left 546 feet in length, a tangent 288 feet, and an 8° curve to the right 354 feet to the point of accident and 220 feet eastward. From the east there are, in succession, an 8° curve to the right 589 feet in length, a tangent 115 feet, and the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is 0.57 percent ascending eastward at the point of accident. Throughout a distance of approximately 200 feet on either side of the point of accident the track is laid in a sidehill cut. The south wall of the cut rises to a maximum height of 25 feet at a point 38 feet south of the center-line of the track.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

S-88. Extra trains will be governed by train orders with respect to opposing extra trains.

* * *

Instructions to train dispatchers read in part as follows:

52. * * * Opposing movements of extras must not be authorized without proper and ample protection against each other over the entire territory being provided;
* * *

* * *

57. * * *

Before issuing running orders to an extra, train dispatcher must enter it on train sheet in proper column, and must carefully check train sheet and train-order book and provide for proper protection against all opposing extra trains on single track before completing the running order.

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speeds are 20 miles per hour for freight trains and 15 miles per hour for steam engines in backward motion without cars.

Description of Accident

At Willits the crew of Extra 2541 West, a west-bound freight train, received, among others, copies of train order No. 40 reading in part as follows:

* * *

ENGINE 2541 RUN EXTRA WILLITS TO TIBURON

* * *

ENGINE 2348 HELP EXTRA 2541 WEST WILLITS TO LARGO
THEN RUN EXTRA LARGO TO UKIAH

* * *

Ukiah and Largo are located, respectively, 25.5 miles and 35.6 miles west of Willits. There is no train order office at Largo. Extra 2541 West departed from Willits at 8:30 a. m., departed from Ukiah at 1:43 p. m., and arrived at Largo about 2:15 p. m., Helper engine 2348 was detached from the train at Largo. About 10 minutes later this engine, moving in backward motion, entered the main track and departed eastward. While it was moving at an estimated speed of 18 miles per hour it collided with Extra 5261 West at a point 3,463 feet east of the east siding-switch at Largo.

Extra 5261 West, a west-bound freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 5262 and 5502, coupled in multiple-unit control and used in helper service, Diesel-electric unit 5261, 58 cars, and a caboose. At Willits the crew received, among others, copies of train order No. 57 reading in part as follows:

* * * ENGINE 5261

RUN EXTRA WILLITS TO SCHELLVILLE * * *

Schellville is located on a line which diverges from the Willits-Tiburon line at Ignacio, 114.6 miles west of Willits. This train departed from Willits at 11:55 a. m. The helper locomotive was detached at Redwood Valley, 17.4 miles west of Willits. The train then proceeded westward, passed Ukiah at 2:05 p. m., and while moving at a speed of 22 miles per hour it collided with Extra 2348 East.

Engine 2348 was moved westward approximately 135 feet by the force of the impact. The rear truck of the tender was derailed to the south. The tender was badly damaged. The first nine cars, the front truck of the tenth car, and the front truck of the locomotive of Extra 5261 West were derailed. The locomotive stopped approximately in line with the track, with the front end about 6 feet east of the rear end of the tender of engine 2348. It was considerably damaged. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the track. The first, second, third, fifth, and sixth cars were badly damaged. The other derailed cars were somewhat damaged.

The engineer and the swing brakeman of Extra 5261 West were killed. The engineer and the fireman of Extra 2348 East and the fireman and the flagman of Extra 5261 West were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2:30 p. m.

Discussion

The rules of this carrier provide that extra trains will be authorized by train orders and will be governed by train orders with respect to opposing extra trains.

Train order No. 40, which was issued at 7:19 a. m., authorized the movement of Extra 2541 West from Willits to Tiburon and the return movement of helper engine 2348 as Extra 2348 East from Largo to Ukiah. Train order No. 57, which was issued at 10:38 a. m., authorized the movement of Extra 5261 West from Willits to Schellville. No provision was made to establish a meeting point between Extra 2348 East and Extra 5261 West or to restrict the movement of either train with respect to the other train. This resulted in an overlapping of authority of the two trains.

The accident occurred in a sidehill cut. As Extra 2348 East and Extra 5261 West were approaching the point where the accident occurred, the wall of the cut restricted the view of either train from the locomotive of the opposing train to a distance of a few hundred feet. The fireman of Extra 2348 East said that when he observed the approach of Extra 5261 West he warned the engineer and then immediately alighted from the engine. He did not know what action was taken by the engineer. The engineer was so seriously injured in the accident that he could not be questioned during the investigation. The fireman

of Extra 5261 West said that as soon as Extra 2348 East became visible to him he called a warning to the engineer and the engineer immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred before the speed of either train was materially reduced.

Train order No. 40 was issued by the third-trick train dispatcher and was transferred to the first-trick train dispatcher at 7:35 a. m. The first-trick train dispatcher understood that this train order authorized the movement of Extra 2348 East from Largo to Ukiah, and he said that the train was properly entered on the train sheet. About 3 hours after he went on duty he issued train order No. 57 which authorized the movement of Extra 5261 West. On the day of the accident the train dispatcher was busier than usual, and when he issued train order No. 57 he overlooked the fact that Extra 2348 East was authorized by train order No. 40 to move from Largo to Ukiah. Before he issued train order No. 57 he checked the train sheet, but in his haste he overlooked the return movement of helper engine 2348 from Largo to Ukiah. As a result, he failed to make provision to restrict the movement of either Extra 2348 East or Extra 5261 West with respect to the other train.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by overlapping of authority of two opposing extra trains.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-ninth day of December, 1952.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

GEORGE W. LAIRD,
Acting Secretary.